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An Essay

on

Acute Peritonitis Independent of that which arises from parturition.

by

William T. Jones

Passed March 10th. 1826

Georgia

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there are few diseases to which the human frame is liable, that prevents such a beautiful and open field for research as that denominated Peritonitis. this disease is comparatively little understood — the reason is obvious, for none of the practical authors such as Cullen and Thomas have taken any notice of it, except as arising from the parturient state. ~~of the [illegible] often [illegible]~~.

But there is also a variety of causes producing it which are applicable to both sexes, so that it is frequently found in men, and in women who have never been pregnant. and this is the species of which I shall treat.

Inflammation of the Peritoneum is not unfrequently an obscure disease and attended ~~with~~ with much danger to the patient — it is frequently difficult to subdue and sometimes when it does not prove fatal it lays the foundation of a long series of ill health — by forming adhesions with itself — and it frequently becomes the origin of Dropsies of the abdomen and may often be the commencement of diseases of the intimate structure of the different organs

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of the abdominal cavity. This disease is very insidious in its approach and not unfrequently arrives at a considerable degree of violence before the patient or his friends are aware of its existence.
Upon enquiring into such cases it may be perceived that the patient has suffered uneasiness in the belly for sometime which being connected with dejection of spirits has been denominated Hypochondriasis.
At other times as the appetite has failed without any evident local disease, but a general uneasiness arising from apparent distension of the bowels it has been denominated Indigestion and in other cases with the pulse somewhat accelerated accompanied by languor and depression of spirits this disease has been termed nervous.

In all these forms Peritonitis may advance slowly and its chronic appear to precede its acute stage. But even this insidious manner of approach will usher in an attack that may deprive the patient

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of existence. Such circumstances as these which are not however sufficiently noticed by authors in their history of Peritonitis, nevertheless appear to me to deserve particular observation in order to turn the attention of Practitioners to the more obscure forms of the disease lest by misapprehension an inflammatory affection should be mistaken for one of an opposite character. I have before said that the Peritoneum is liable to two kinds of Inflammation acute and chronic.

I shall take into consideration the acute form — it is ushered by chills and shiverings — the continuance of the cold stage is extremely indefinite, sometimes continuing for two or three days and then again not lasting more than twelve hours.

Next we have fever, and here the pulse is extremely well calculated to deceive being very small quick and chordee.

The bowels are sometimes costive at others loose — there soon ensues a sense of great heat and

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pain in the abdomen sometimes it is confined to some particular part and at others it is felt over the whole abdomen.

The uneasiness and pain increasing rapidly the belly becomes very painful to the touch – there is considerable thirst and dryness of the tongue and fauces – which are affected as in Typhus, in most instances though not unfrequently as I have seen them in one or two instances perfectly moist throughout the whole course of the disease.

These symptoms increasing rapidly in the course of twelve or twenty four hours the soreness of the Abdomen is so great that the patient cannot bear the weight of the bed clothes the pulse becomes extremely quick small and contracted beating from one hundred and twenty to a hundred and thirty in a minute

Then comes on a tension and swelling of the Abdomen the tongue becomes incrusted, and the patient lies on his back with his knees drawn up towards his belly, and this

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proof of the disease. — [illegible] adhesions [illegible] [illegible], joining all the [illegible] together & sometimes joining some particular [illegible] to each other, Dissections seem to us that the peritoneum is not always red. but this is no proof that inflammation has not existed, Death in these cases seems to have proceeded [illegible] [illegible] with the blood. But the peritoneum is so much thicker than in a healthy state and is opaque, there is also a serum like milky fluid [illegible] spread over the whole surface of the abdomen which is a sufficient proof that inflammation has existed.

The mode of treatment applicable to this disease is a subject of much difficulty, because the physicians of this country entertain an [illegible] difference. But there is something very peculiar in the [illegible] [illegible] to mind — Therefore after a good deal of reflection on this subject I am satisfied with the following [illegible] [illegible]. — We should first commence with

the employment of the Lancet [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] force of the strength of the patient and other circumstances of the case [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] required to be taken [illegible] is always regulated in proportion to the severity of the attack. We generally take at the first Bleeding [illegible] ounces from a large orifice and if we find little effect produced we should repeat the operation in the course of five or six hours, and it not unfrequently happens that we are obliged to bleed forty or fifty ounces in the course of twenty four hours before we can expect a cure. Blood-letting is an indispensable remedy.

After the constitutional effects occasioned by the local inflammation are partly removed and the disease freely reduced to a state more nearly approaching to a simple local affection, we may derive considerable benefit from the application of leeches and cups to the abdomen so as to keep up a copious flow of blood.

[illegible] acts like a charm — this remedy seems to be of the most unequivocal advantage — I am [illegible] that [illegible] a termination of the [illegible] extend to the interior part. Whenever it is convenient it is best to confine the external [illegible] of fomentation and the patient with the [illegible] must be [illegible] of the Diaphoretics [illegible] intervals. But we cannot at all times procure the vapour bath, we use then a simpler the other means the best which is a pill composed of Ipecacuanha and [illegible] Opium, give one every two hours. This seems to act by the Ipecacuanha determining to the surface and the Opium checks the Diarrhoea if there should be most [illegible] in the case and at the same time assists in allaying the pain — If a similar efficacy to the Ipecacuanha with Opium, is Dovers powder we should at the same time employ warm applications to the Abdomen — the best, which is a bread and milk

[illegible]

[illegible] based [illegible] but upon reasoning from [illegible] cases on the subject [illegible] [illegible] + [illegible] to urge

The [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] from the bowels [illegible] we [illegible] upon them with [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] the cathartic; the [illegible] an emulgent when given in [illegible] condition of the [illegible] the [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] these should we must attend to the [illegible] [illegible] remove the system [illegible], the [illegible] is an infusion of [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] at the same time we may [illegible] the chalk in [illegible] — [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] drink [illegible] of [illegible] water. [illegible] [illegible] through [illegible] remedy [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] the state of the disease [illegible] we [illegible] [illegible] much [illegible] from the [illegible] [illegible] the use of [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] the [illegible] [illegible])

irritation of the Stomach (which generally exists at at this stage of the disease) subduing the tone of Vascular action and general excitement [illegible] [illegible] condition [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] the [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] by the [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] communication.

[illegible] to throw off the tympanitic state of the bowels – [illegible] there [illegible] great irritation of Stomach with [illegible] vomiting [illegible] direct the patient to take the following – 2 [illegible] and 3 [illegible] Emulsion ℥iv. give [illegible] hours the dose [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] the [illegible] the [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] the [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]

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two remedies alternately every hour – or we may direct them to take a saline draught in the act of effervescence with the addition of ten drops of laudanum.

Cold has been recommended in this disease by Dr Tilton [illegible] the decision of a great name will decide [illegible] it appear to be beneficial [illegible] but it seems to [illegible] to have the sanction of [illegible] than of practice. It has a great influence in inflammation of other parts of the body. but it does not become [illegible] [illegible] of the same [illegible] act of [illegible] to [illegible] think of [illegible] Peritonitis [illegible] the same kind of [illegible] the seat of the inflammation – and what would [illegible] in the one might be equally so in the other – This is the treatment to be used [illegible] in the most violent forms of Peritonitis — but [illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible] with great inflation of [illegible]

will soon be justified by a greater freedom in the action of the arterial system, by an abatement of the languor, and by a diminution of the pain and tenderness. We should also employ warm fomentations to the abdomen by means of flannel cloths wrung out in a decoction of equal parts of camomile flowers and bruised poppy heads with a small addition of rectified spirits or spirits of Camphor—

Having thus delivered my observations on Peritonitis in as concise a manner as possible, I shall now close this essay— which I fear will suffer in the eye of the critic from the uncouth form in which it makes its appearance— but to close this with out an acknowledgement to the illustrious professors of this university would be a breach of that duty to which my feelings prompt me. To you, Gentlemen, at least this small tribute of my esteem is due.

Permit me
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Permit me then to present you with the sincere acknowledgements of a pupil, for the many opportunities of improvement which your lectures have afforded me. With the assurance of my fervent wishes that you may long continue to enjoy all the pleasures of an ample success in cultivating and improving the science of medicine — I bid you adieu ———

Dr.